



Santa Muerte has a long history of relatively informal ritual and practice, allowing followers to communicate with Death in whichever means they consider most effective or suits them most appropriately. One of the most common forms of worship involves votive candles, cheap, multi-colored candles which can be found in any number of locations. Here Santa Muerte is pictured on a candle in an esoterica shop in Catemaco, Veracruz, among other devotional figures, including Saintly Troika, Saint Jude, the Virgin of Guadalupe.

The differently-colored candles signify different prayers to the Bony Lady. Red candles signify love and passion, whereas black candles denote an appeal for vengeance and harm. Other colors commonly used by followers include white, meaning purity and protection; blue, denoting insight and determination; gold, which is lit in an appeal for wealth; purple, a prayer for supernatural healing; and green, signifying justice before the law. Votive Candles at F & F Botanica, New Orleans.



Most Holy Death votive candle
used for requests for dollars.





Along with votive candles, incense is also commonly burned ritualistically in order to communicate with Santa Muerte. Pictured here is incense available for purchase at an esoterica shop in Richmond, Virginia.



Votive candles and incense are commonly incorporated into home shrines to Santa Muerte. A typical home altar consists of an effigy of the deity, adorned with decorations and offerings to the Bony Lady, such as baked goods, tobacco, alcohol, money, flowers, and water. From the 1790s to 2002, the majority of Santa Muerte practitioners kept private shrines in their homes well-hidden from public view.

- Plaque, located at a Santa Muerte shrine in Santa Ana, Chapitiro, Michoacan, reads "Thanks for your protection my Pretty Girl. Esmeralda and family."
-



Saint Death, nicknamed Naomi, dressed in gold for abundance and prosperity, at private shrine on outskirts of Morelia, Michoacan.



The black Angel of Death, ready for matters of protection and harm at private shrine on outskirts of Morelia, Michoacan.

Right: Red Saint Death of love and passion
Below: The Queen of Death, private shrine on outskirts of Morelia, Michoacan





Left: from a private shrine on outskirts of Morelia, Michoacan
Right: Santa Marihuana at an altar discovered during a drug bust in Houston, Texas.



Altar at a criminal safehouse in North Carolina



Two shrines in the home of Vicente Ramos Perez in Morelia, Michoacan.



In the clutches of Saint Death, a third shrine at home of Vicente Ramos Perez, Morelia, Michoacan

In 2001, Doña Queta, Godmother of Santa Muerte, publicly displayed her personal shrine outside her home in Tepito, Mexico. Since then, her shrine, which includes a life-sized Santa Muerte effigy, has become the most popular of its kind in Mexico. Here Queta, who is commonly attributed with shifting the worship of Santa Muerte from a private to public practice, sits with an author outside of her home.





Today, home shrines are not only typically displayed in the home where they can be seen by visitors, but are also found in privately-owned stores and even on sidewalks throughout Mexico and the United States. Pictured is an in-store altar at Botanica Los Sueños, San Francisco, CA



Cloaked in Crimson for Affairs of the Heart, jewelry supply store, Mexico City.



Seven-color Santa Muerte for miracles on many fronts, Sonora Market stall, Mexico City.



A sidewalk shrine in Mexico City featuring the Lady in Blue. Thought to bring insight and concentration, Santa Muerte cloaked in blue is a common effigy among students.

Santa Muerte's followers also make public displays of their devotion by wearing devotional objects, such as pendants, t-shirts, tattoos, and even tennis shoes. Pictured here is a bus company security agent in Mexico City as well as a Santa Muerte devotee wearing two pendants of the saint.





The first Santa Muerte church was established by David Romo in 2003 in Tepito, Mexico, just a few miles from Doña Queta's notorious shrine. With the establishment of these two places of worship, Tepito has become an increasingly popular pilgrimage site for Santa Muerte's followers. Here devotees are shown making the journey to the downtown Mexican city to visit the famous shrine.







House of (Saint) Death, plaque at the home of Doña Queta in the barrio of Tepito, Mexico City





• Women standing outside of the famous Tepito shrine. •



With a nationwide average age of twenty-four, Santa Muerte's followers generally reflect Mexico's youth. The majority of her devotees within and beyond Mexico are in their teens, twenties, and thirties; however, they are representative of a multitude of social classes and occupations, including students, housewives, drug traffickers, politicians, doctors, lawyers, artists, and taxi drivers. Here a young devotee holds two statues of Santa Muerte in Tepito, Mexico.



TICA de UÑAS

TEL: 451245
CEL: 451245

FESTIVAL DE HUEVO

KEU
TUK
WOL

ESTABA
DAGDA



Bano

Fraccion
Gran Ciel
de 1.50

BANO

Bano

ETICA de

YO 74621 T

MA

PLAZA



Numerous organized places of worship have been established since the founding of David Romo's Traditional Holy Catholic Apostolic Church in 2003, including several in the United States. Among them includes he First Santa Muerte Shrine located in New Orleans, Louisiana.

Two shrines at the First Santa Muerte Shrine
in New Orleans. Left: Bony Bride
Below: "Guada-Muerte"





• Temple of Death, Santa Muerte church in the Morelos district of Mexico City. •

Two Santa Muerte shrines at the Santa Ana Chapitiro, Michoacan. Left: Death cloaked in dollars. Right: Queen of Death with the whole world in her hands.





The Angel of Death playing the flute, Santa Muerte shrine in Santa Ana Chapitiro, Michoacan.



Left: Wood-carved saint of death. Right: Death a la Mexicana.
Both featured at the Santa Ana Chapitiro in Michoacan.

Death in Dollars, Santa Muerte temple,
City of Puebla.



The White Girl in white in the
Santa Ana Chapitiro, Michoacan.



Alongside public worship in one of many temples, festivals and other public gatherings are held in honor of Santa Muerte. This poster advertises "Special Songs for Santa Muerte," services of mariachi the band "Nuevo Tepatepec" in the District of Tepatepec in the State of Mexico, home to a 72-foot Santa Muerte statue.



**CANTOS ESPECIALES
A LA SANTA MUERTE**

MARIACHI
"Nuevo Tepatepec"

**FCO. I MADERO
TEPATEPEC, NG**

017387240942
7721044186



There is an annual celebration among the Santa Muerte community commemorating the reveal of Doña Queta's shrine. Pictured is a banner announcing the ninth anniversary, on Oct. 31, 2010.



However, as Santa Muerte worship has become more public, the practice has attracted a great deal of controversy. In 2013, a three-foot tall statue of Santa Muerte was placed in the San Benito Municipal Cemetery:



The statue featured a scythe in the hand of Santa Muerte, to which was attached an Angel of Death Card, and an owl at the feet of the Bony Lady, which signifies wisdom in both Mexican and American cultures, as well as death in Mexican tradition.



The statue outraged general adversaries of the tradition as well as those with family members and friends buried in the cemetery and was destroyed in late January of 2013, shortly after its placement on the grounds.



